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YOU POSTED**

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Headline news for busy
church editors

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Here is the Good News of the United Church of Christ, especially edited for congregational publications, with topical news of the wider church, helpful hints to strengthen members' faith and pride in the denomination and personal testimonies to stir the spirit. Each story is short and complete and can stand alone, ready to drop into the weekly bulletin or the monthly newsletter. The code at the end of some entries refers interested readers to a more comprehensive story in *United Church News*.

FROM LITTLE ACORNS – With \$1,000 seed money, tiny (100 members) Friends Congregational UCC, College Station, Texas, is growing a giant oak.

The grant, from the UCC's Just Peace Appeal, helped establish Friends Peace Institute.

"We wanted to make a difference in our community," says Jean Bowman, the member who sparked the creation of the institute.

In its first year, the Friends Peace Institute hosted a benefit concert for Habitat for Humanity; held public forums on health care reform, gay rights, environmental racism and racial and religious tolerance; mounted a peace art exhibit; and developed a peace and justice curriculum for Vacation Bible School.

"We wanted this church to be a shining force for social and religious tolerance," says Friends' pastor, the Rev. Charles Stark, who notes that his part of Texas is politically conservative, with its quota of hate groups, including the Ku Klux Klan.

UCC RESPONDS TO JAPAN QUAKE – Even while the citizens of Kobe, Japan, were enduring aftershocks from January's devastating earthquake, the UCC swung into action with a \$15,000 gift to a church agency there. In addition, the United Church Board for World Ministries has given \$10,000 to the Korean Christian Church in Japan and \$2,000 to Church World Service, the disaster relief arm of the National Council of Churches. A portion of that money is from One Great Hour of Sharing gifts.

At the same time, UCC missions and stewardship executives appealed to UCC churches. Congregations may plan special offerings to send relief money, marked "Japan Earthquake," to their conference office with the request that it be transferred as quickly as possible to the Rev. Doris Powell, UCC treasurer.

Ching-fen Hsiao, East Asia/Pacific regional secretary for the World Board, says that all UCC/Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) missionaries in the area, many of whom teach at Kobe College, are safe, but a preliminary report from Japanese church officials counts at least 10 United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) churches destroyed or heavily damaged.

Ironically, the day after the Japanese quake, churches in Southern California, including the UCC, gathered together for an ecumenical prayer service to commemorate the first anniversary of the earthquake that ripped into the Los Angeles area. "It was an eerie feeling," says the Rev. Jeffrey Utter, pastor of **Congregational UCC of Chatsworth**, whose sanctuary was damaged in the quake.

MALL WALL – Scratch a teenager and chances are you'll find a mall rat. Which is why the UCC's Office of Communication picked a Cleveland-area mall to debut teen-produced TV public service messages.

Local teens took video production courses sponsored by the office and created a series of hard-hitting PSAs on issues like racism, violence and hate. The images were projected on a video wall of nine screens, each one showing a part of the overall picture.

The Mall Wall project was funded by a grant from the all-church offering, Neighbors in Need. A guide explaining how to replicate the project will soon be available from the Office of Communication. For information, contact Cade Bursell at (216) 736-2204.

NO COMMENT – In a story headlined, "Measuring mainline vital signs," *The Christian Century* reports that Episcopalians, Presbyterians and UCC members are found in far greater proportion in positions of power than their numbers would otherwise suggest.

DREAMING BIG – For 20 years, retired UCC executive Warren Marr dreamed of a replica of the 19th century slave ship, *La Amistad*, as a floating museum to teach a side of American history that often doesn't make it into textbooks. Now, the state of Connecticut has contributed \$2.5 million for Mystic Seaport to build and manage a full size copy of the 64-foot topsail schooner.

La Amistad precipitated the mutiny that triggered America's first civil rights case and consolidated the abolitionist movement. In 1839, Africans on the ship mutinied off the coast of Cuba, killing all the crew but the two owners, and demanded that they sail the ship toward the rising sun back home. But during the night, the owners headed north, hoping to make landfall in the southern United States. The ship was impounded off Long Island, and the owners brought suit in New Haven, Conn., for the return of their property.

Congregational abolitionists persuaded 73-year-old former President John Quincy Adams to take the case, which went all the way to the Supreme Court. The mutineers were released and returned home. The case solidified a loose confederation of abolitionists into the American Missionary Society, the predecessor body of the American Missionary Association, which is part of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries.

The ship will start sailing in 1998 with an inner city crew.

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COMMUNION FOR CHILDREN? – There's nothing in Scripture limiting communion by age or prior study, so many UCC churches invite children to the table with the consent of parents.

"I do believe that children intuitively understand the sacrament and its mystery better than adults," says the Rev. Paul Hetrich of St. Peter's Pikeland UCC, Chester Springs, Pa.

The Rev. Sue Bertollette of St. John's UCC, Lansdale, Pa., agrees.

"Children bring a naturalness to worship which, in many ways, stands as judgement upon our over-formulated ways," she says.

Bertollette thinks that communion rules – most common are a minimum age and confirmation – are made to guard against abuse of the sacrament, but she wonders, "Are we needlessly excluding a segment of the church family from an important part of worship?"

Here are some guidelines suggested by Pleasantville UCC, Chalfont, Pa.:

- Parents should discuss communion with children to decide if they understand its meaning.
- Parent and child should participate in preparatory workshops on the fundamental understanding of the eucharist and the importance of sharing the communion table as family units.
- At least one parent should be a church member.
- Preparation for and participation in communion does not substitute for completion of requirements for confirmation.

– Thanks to the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference newsletter, *Courier*

TAKE A BREAK – Is your church frantic with activity, like monthly board and committee meetings, fund-raising fairs, Christmas pageants, membership drives and stewardship appeals? Some congregations get so wrapped up in the business of running a church, they forget why they have a church in the first place.

Nu'uaniu Congregational UCC in Honolulu came up with a novel solution. Take a sabbatical. The church, that is, as well as the pastor.

For four months, Nu'uaniu suspended most monthly and annual activities.

Instead, "we focused on spiritual growth," says the Rev. Wallace Ryan Kuroiwa, pastor.

New Bible study groups, prayer circles and a religious retreat blossomed at the 500-member church as parishioners transferred energy from matters of meetings to matters of the soul.

"It was not just rest, but a time the Bible calls holy rest, in which you take time to grow spiritually," explains Kuroiwa, who thinks the Protestant work ethic is responsible for making some churches so frantically busy.